Mother from page C1

than what's popularly considered beautiful hairunding 'groit' tradition to tell about our cultural past, said Fair, reforring to the African oral storytelling custom. 'I just want to bring people back to a place where they were as kids—a safer place.' As an African-American, going back in history to find a secure hamle utilimately leads to confronting unsettling issues of race and oppression. It was no different for Fair.

In March of 1996, Fair was selected to participate in the

"Tight Pack Figure Casting" exhibit to be created for the newly constructed Museum of African-American History in Detroit For about a month, ahe assisted Datroit artists Donald Calloway and Lavern Homan increating 50 life-size molds of enslaved Africans.
All artists were commissioned by Sculptural Basis of Sante Fo. NM. The museum and exhibit opened to popular and critical acclaim in mid April.
The full-body casts are part of the museum's eight-part "Timeline of African-American History" core chilbit, which depicts African tribal memories to the modern-day struggle for empow-

the inhumane transport of Africans, who were shackled as human cargo bound for America. The sculpture consists of casts made from local African-American students, ages eight to 17, including Fair's son, Stephen, a Southfield High student.

"It was haunting to see, and realize that the avorage age was 13 for enslaved children," said Valerie Fair. We knew what we were doing wann we were assembling the piece, but the impact wasn't there until I saw it completed and installed (at the museum's opening).

While it only took about three

pleted and installor at the museum's opening)."

While it only took about three hours for a body cast to be made, Stephen Fair said the experience has given him a tangible link to

an infamous event of American history. "My 16-year-old body is cast forever in permanent plas-ter," he said. "It's opened me up to being a part of history."

Artistic vision

Artistic vision

A samatress by trade, painter
by choice and artist by instinct,
the soft-spoken Fair has no
regrets that her role as a mether
came before her personal ambition as an artist. "You can live
artistically even if you're not producing art," she said.

Even today, she's a bit reluctant shout drawing attention to
her work. She doesn't refer to
abstract explanations, just a
driving principle if we don't pass
along our traditions, she said,

they'll fade away.
Fair, whose braided hair gives
her a youthful wistfulness,
remains humble about her latest
artistic accomplishments. She
talks about her art in a hushed
tane, as if whispering while sipping coffee in her kitchen. She
laughs easily about the days
when she painted "The Three
Wiso Men" mural on her back
door because she didn't have a
canyas.

door because she didn't have a canvas.
Finding a canvas is no longer a problem. With her increasing number of paintings and exhibits, sho's found a way to rekindle those innocent days when her grandmother encouraged her to draw, paint and make clothes for her dolls.

"When I look at what she's doing now, I think 'Sho's persovered," said Stephon Fair. "I appreciate that."
Ironically, the central theme of Fair's work is to draw attention to the plight of today's families. Two years ago, she and five other women stood in rush hour traffic along Grand Boulevard and performed '50 Ways to Leave Your Child Alive," an engaging look at attending to achide need for affirmation. "Issues affecting families affect our larger society," she said. "Family is what I know."
And for that, Valerie Fair has proven that no college degree is necessary, just a whole lot of persistence.

Conversations from page C1

raiser. This Wednesday, international planist David Syme will perform a benefit concert at The Community House in Birmingham. For an evening, appreciate Syme's gift. Appreciate the language of compassion. Then, try to figure out why organizations like FAR struggle from year to year to find funding.

FAR generates revenue from the United Way, private donather than the control of the United Way, private donather than the control of the Con

tions, fees from services and two annual fund-raisers. The more time they have to hustle to raise funds, the less time devoted to those children and adults who need their therapeutic art pro-

That's not to imply that they're not doing enough. On the contrary, in addition to their art instruction programs, FAR organizes a softball lengue and pro-

vides services on-site at schools.
"Music and the arts are so accessible," said Lott. "You can

accessible," said Lott, "You can teach the concept of 'up 'regard-less if the person is mobile. With individuals with special needs, it's been shown that musical activities stimulate critical path-ways in the brain."

There's another cliche that bears repeating; people who work for organizations like FAR

sre special people. Connie Lott confirms that adage.

After stepping in several times when the executive director's costion was vacant, Lott thought that maybe she should apply for the job. There heart been a vacancy since.

"Some of the cothers with more severe emotional and physical impairments have learned more active the post of the poople have been with us 20 years or more," said Lott. "Some adults, now in their 40s, have been stimulated to selves because of their participa-tion in FAR's a..., music and

wheelchair or handicap, but a person with a gift, said Lott. They just need to be shown the expressive language of art. Frank Provenzano covers arts for communities in the Observer & Eccentric coverage area. Write to him at the Birmingham Eccentic Newspaces 805 E. Manle tic Newspaces 805 E. Manle dance programs.
"Our goal is to help them tric Newspaper, 305 E. Maple, develop so they're not being. Birmingham, MI 48009, or call defined as a person with a (810) 901-2557.

ART BEAT

Please send press releases, and ther arts-related information to rank Provenzano, Observer & ccentric Newspapers, 805 E. faple, Birmingham, 48009 or ccentric Newspo Taple, Birmingho x (810) 644-1314.

fax (810) 644-1314.

QALLERY WAIK

Visit the 13 galleries in downtown Royal Oak 6 p.m.-10 p.m.
Wednesday, May 7. The 10th
Gallery Walk is eponsored by the
Royal Oak Gallery Association
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Artist demonstrations, food and
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at the galleries along the route.
A trolley will also travel to destination spots. A \$3 d-anation to an
arts scholarship fund provides
access to the tour. For information, call (810) 546-8810.

tion, call (810) 546-8810.

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